

Preface

The present volume offers a selection of papers presented at the Eleventh International April Conference “Ambiguity and the Search for Meaning: English and American Studies at the Beginning of the 21st Century,” which took place in Kraków on 23–25 April 2008. The occasion gathered specialists in English and American studies from several European countries and the United States, continuing the tradition of triennial meetings held in Kraków since 1978. It has become a tradition for each successive April Conference to attract more participants than the previous one; in 2008, 138 linguists and literary scholars met in Kraków and 120 papers were read.

This volume contains a selection of 37 papers on literature and culture. The authors address one of the main dilemmas facing the literary scholar: how to position themselves towards the issue of ambiguity in literature. The universality of the theme resulted in a variety of critical approaches, starting from Terence McCarthy’s staunch defence of definite meaning in Malory’s *Morte Darthur* to Robert Rehder’s celebration of ambiguity in Modernist poetry and art. Elinor Shaffer reminded us of the significance of William Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, whose 80th anniversary of publication comes in 2010, for the development of English studies. The articles span over 600 years of writing in the English language from Malory to Banville, from medieval romances to George Harrison’s songs. To quote William Empson, who was a silent presence at the conference, each of them marks an attempt at “teasing out the meanings of the text.”¹

We would like to express our gratitude to the Advisory Board, who refereed the papers for publication and provided many valuable comments for the authors and editors. Our thanks go to Teresa Bela, Joelle Biele, Julie Campbell, Benjamin Colbert, Marta Gibińska-Marzec, Aleksandra Kędzierska, David Malcolm, Irena Przemecka, Krystyna Stamirowska-Sokołowska, Lisa Vargo and Anna Walczuk. All the errors that may have found their way into the text are, of course, the responsibility of the editors.

¹ William Empson, Preface to the Second Edition of *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 3rd ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1956) x.

The Editors would like to express their sincere thanks to the Faculty of Philology of the Jagiellonian University, as well as to the Institute of English Philology, for subsidizing the publication of this volume.

This volume is dedicated to the memory of Robert Rehder, an eminent scholar, a distinguished poet and a great friend, who not only participated in five of our conferences, but also generously shared his poetry with us. His presence will be sorely missed.

The Editors